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## ON RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS IN THE STRASBOURG JURISPRUDENCE

The exposition of religious symbols can be considered as one of the forms of the manifestation of religion or belief, and when it takes place in the public sphere it can give rise to a number of conflicts. The European Court of Human Rights has on a number of occasions had an opportunity to deal with cases in which limitations on the exposition of religious symbols were imposed on private persons in the interest of public safety or in public educational institutions. In the *Lautsi* case the Court, for the first time, had the occasion to deal with the situation in which the national authorities were responsible for the exposition of a religious symbol in a public educational institution.

The article attempts at answering the question whether the Court has managed to work out a coherent European standard in this sphere or rather decides such cases on the case to case basis. Having analyzed the case-law of the ECHR concerning religious symbols the Author points out, *inter alia*, the problems with the coherency of the Court's position as regards religious symbols, after the Grand Chamber's ruling in the *Lausti* case. He comes to the conclusion, that the Court is generally inclined to adopt the position of judicial self-restraint using the margin of appreciation doctrine and is prepared to recognize both the French *laïcité* model and the traditionally catholic Italian model as being in line with the axiology of the Convention. According to the Author, however, the Court should react more robustly whenever restrictions concerning the wearing of religious symbols are contrary to the proportionality principle, due to, for example, the severity of sanctions imposed on individuals by national authorities. The difficult relationship between the interests of the majority and the minority should also be adequately taken into account when deciding such cases at the Strasbourg level.